

FACT SHEET

10/8/99

Immigration Enforcement in Arizona—1994-1999

The state of Arizona continues to play a prominent role in the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) multi-year border enforcement strategy. Five years ago, as part of that effort, INS inaugurated Operation Safeguard, an aggressive initiative incorporating new agents, equipment and technology. The goal of Operation Safeguard was to heighten deterrence and improve control along the nearly 300 miles of international border covered by the Tucson Border Patrol Sector.

As part of the ongoing expansion of Operation Safeguard, INS doubled the number of Border Patrol agents temporarily assigned to Douglas and Naco by shifting an additional 35 Border Patrol agents to the area this week. The redeployment brings the total of temporary and permanent agents on duty in the Douglas-Naco area to 443, a 23-percent increase compared to this time last year and an increase of nearly 500 percent since 1994.

In addition to the new personnel, the Tucson Border Patrol Sector has received an array of new equipment, including three retractable, mobile observation towers. Equipped with infrared scopes, the so-called Skywatchers unfold to a height of 20 feet, affording agents an unobstructed view of the surrounding area.

The infusion of resources into the Douglas-Naco area is the next logical step in Operation Safeguard, the multi-year enforcement strategy that has restored order and control to the border in and around Nogales. Formerly the busiest illegal immigration corridor in Arizona, Border Patrol apprehensions in the Nogales area are down by 70 percent, compared to last year. During that same period, the crime rate in Nogales declined by more than 40 percent.

The beginning of Operation Safeguard in Arizona coincided with the launch of major immigration enforcement initiatives in two other key border corridors, Operation Gatekeeper (San Diego), and Operation Hold the Line (El Paso). Over the last two years, INS has broadened its enforcement focus further to include southern Texas, with the launch of Operation Rio Grande in McAllen, and eastern California, with the expansion of Operation Gatekeeper to El Centro.

The aim of INS' comprehensive border enforcement effort is to reduce the adverse effects of illegal immigration and improve the quality of life for residents along the immediate border and throughout the nation. In support of this effort, Congress has provided the agency with a substantial increase in resources. In the last five years, the number of Border Patrol agents INS has assigned to the Southwest border more than doubled, climbing from 3,389 in fiscal year 1993 to more than 8,200 today.

That enhanced enforcement presence, together with an infusion of sophisticated new equipment and technology, has transformed the landscape along crucial sections of the U.S.-Mexico border. Border Patrol apprehensions in the San Diego area, once the nation's busiest illegal border crossing corridor, are at a 25-year low. Crime rates in many border communities, including Nogales, have fallen. At the same time, the fees charged by alien smugglers along the Southwest border have risen to record levels, a sign that the border is increasingly difficult to breach.

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As INS strategists predicted, the intensified enforcement pressure in California and Texas has prompted a growing number of undocumented migrants to attempt to enter this country illegally along the Arizona border. The new deployment strategy being implemented as part of Operation Safeguard is designed to address this shift in border crossing patterns and build on the border enhancements that have already been put into place in Arizona. This Administration has made a long-term commitment to building a border that works, and promotes commerce and tourism, while at the same time deterring those who attempt to come here illegally.

	Before Safeguard (October 1, 1994)	FY 1999	Remarks
Border Patrol Agents	287	1,285 permanent agents	137 temporary agents, deployed to Tucson
Land Border Inspectors	Fewer than 100 statewide	188	Reduced waits for legal crossers
Anti-smuggling	8 anti-smuggling unit agents	13 anti-smuggling unit agents	5 new ASU agents added in May to disrupt smuggling activities
Fencing	3/4 mile	9.1 miles of primary fencing	Reinforced fences deter illegal crossings
Lighting	none	2 miles of permanent high-intensity lighting and 3 miles of portable lighting	One mile each of permanent lighting in Douglas and Nogales Two miles of portable lighting in Nogales, one mile in Douglas
Infrared Scopes	3	14	Aids detection and deterrence of illegal crossers
Underground Sensors	448	967	High-tech detection of illegal immigrants
Skywatcher Mobile Towers	none	3	Provides expanded surveillance capabilities
Low-light television cameras	5 cameras in Nogales area	20 cameras in Nogales and 15 in Douglas	Increases efficiency by allowing one agent to monitor multiple locations simultaneously
Vehicles	367	1,127	Fleet increased by more than 200 percent
Aircraft	2 helicopters, 3 fixed wing aircraft	6 helicopters, including 2 on loan from San Diego, and 1 fixed wing aircraft	Critical support for agents on the ground
Horse Patrol	2 horse units	4 horse units	Patrolling in rough terrain